DNI Clapper's As Delivered Remarks at Morehouse College Lecture

Remarks as delivered by

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Morehouse College Lecture

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Black lives matter. Let's start with that simple, positive assertion – black lives matter. I cannot in 2016 come to Morehouse College, one of the most respected historically black colleges in the nation, Dr. King's alma mater, and a school that is so active in the black lives matter movement that you dedicated all of your Crown Forums this year to it, and not make that clear. So I want to thank Dr. Wilson for inviting me, so that I can say here today – black lives matter.

It bothers me that declaring a simple truth is somehow so controversial. I mean, I get it. I understand why it's controversial. People hear the positive assertion that black lives matter, and they somehow assume there's a negative connotation associated with it. They seem to hear, if black lives matter, then other lives don't matter as much, when that's not what that phrase means at all – at least not to me.

So whether we agree with every tenet of the movement or not, noting that I'm not here to talk about the movement and that it's illegal for any government official – which includes me for another 77 days, but who's counting? [laughter] – to endorse any movement, it's important for leaders to assert the fact that black lives matter, because our nation has a long history of black lives not mattering to many people, or at least not mattering as much as other lives.

Michelle Obama, our superb First Lady, has said a number of times that when she sees her daughters in the White House, she remembers that she and they live in a house that was built in

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part by slaves. And because the first family is a family of color, we are visually confronted with the fact that black lives matter more in our nation now, certainly than they did in the last decade of the Eighteenth Century when the White House was under construction.

A lot of people say that's ancient American history, but in our lifetimes too, to many people black lives have mattered less than other lives. I remember the first time that distinction came into focus for me. My dad was an Army signals intelligence officer in the Second World War. And what he was involved in was intercepting and deriving useful intelligence from German and Japanese communications.

After the war, he decided to make the Army a career. And as a result of traveling the globe with him, I grew up on intelligence sites and operations around the world. Some of my earliest memories are of living in Eritrea on the Horn of Africa in 1946 and in Japan during the Korean War.

I was about 11 years old when my family lived in a place called Chitose, which was on the island of Hokkudo, the northernmost island of Japan. That was four years after Harry Truman signed the executive order that desegregated the military. It may have done so institutionally but certainly not socially.

A lot of the social life on military bases, particularly overseas, and on the base where my dad was stationed and where we lived, was centered around Sunday brunches at the officers club. The club put out their best linen and china, and they always had a Japanese band who did a great job of impersonating American music. Officers wore their dress uniforms, which included my dad, who was then a captain – a junior officer. Wives wore their best dresses, complete with, and I never see this today, white gloves. And everyone dressed up, even us kids. So basically, for me it was torture. [laughter]

As a kid, I didn't know all the senior officers in the club; I didn't know who all the colonels and lieutenant colonels were. But one Sunday, I recognized my dentist. He was an Army first lieutenant, a junior officer much like my dad. That particular Sunday when he came to brunch at the officer's club, my family had a prime table near the band, but because he was black, my dentist sat by himself on the perimeter of the room.

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So when the music stopped, my mom – and I think she picked that point on purpose – stood up. A few people looked at her. She rather ostentatiously walked over to our dentist's table. By this time, the whole room was looking at her. She talked with him for a minute or two, and then invited him to sit with us, took him by the hand, and just as ostentatiously led him to our table.

As they walked to our table, all those colonels and lieutenant colonels – the senior officers, stopped looking at her and started staring at my dad, with that unspoken look of, "Can't you get your wife under control?" I'll never forget, my dad's expression was a mixture of amusement, admiration – and fear. But to his great credit, he made my sister and me move over to make room at our table for the dentist.

There may have been, in the day, consequences for my parents, although if there were they never mentioned them. In fact, my mother never said a word, even after we got home, about what she'd done, and she talked to me about a lot of other things. That may be why I remember this so vividly, even though it took place 64 years ago. So, at a very impressionable age, my mother showed me that black lives matter just as much as any other lives. Of course, that was not a commonly-held belief at the time.

Around the same age, my experiences with my dad got me interested in the intelligence profession. After we left Japan in 1953, we were moving to our next duty station in Massachusetts. What military parents usually did was park their kids with the grandparents while they find a new place to live. My grandparents, my mother's parents, lived in Philadelphia. I was 12 years old, and it was always great being with my grandparents, because they would let me stay up as late as I wanted and watch TV.

One of my favorite things to do on Friday night was to watch what was called the Schmitz Beer Mystery Hour. They showed black and white Charlie Chan movies I use to love. The movie would end about 12:30, and I did what was the 1950s equivalent of channel surfing. Now you have to understand that in those days you had to actually walk up to the TV and turn the dial to change the channels. We didn't have remotes.

So I walk up to the TV and I turn the dial. There's only four channels, and I stopped between channels four and five – I'll never forget this – because I heard people talking. I'm thinking, hey

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what is that? There's no picture, just people talking. So I listened for a while, maybe 15 minutes, and I figured out it was the Philadelphia police department dispatcher. That was kind of interesting, and I wanted to listen some more. So I went to the kitchen and got some toothpicks and stuck them in the dial to hold it between the channels.

That's right. I hacked my grandparents' black and white TV set – with a toothpick.

It intrigued me. So the next night, I stayed up with a map of the city of Philadelphia, and I started plotting where all the police cruisers were dispatched to. I kept listening, and I figured out what all the 10 codes were – you know, 10-4, 10-5, and all those; and I figured out the call signs, all the personal identifiers that the lieutenants had. Then by plotting all the calls on the map, I figured out what the police district boundaries were. So I built myself some card files – what we'd call metadata today. Pretty soon, I'm sleeping all day and staying up all night, listening to police calls and building my card file.

About six weeks later, my folks had found a place to live in Massachusetts, and they came back to Philadelphia to retrieve my sister and me. My dad asks, so what've you been doing? Well, I whip out my map, I whip out my card file, and I'll never forget the expression on my dad's face. He said, "My god, I've raised my own replacement." [laughter]

I tell the story because it's humorous, I hope, but it's also an illustration of what intelligence work is about. It involves research, determination, persistence, patience, continuity, drawing inferences when you don't have complete information, and taking advantage of what you hear, because I obviously wasn't an intended listener. That little avocation 62 years ago, when I was a 12-year-old kid, started me down the path to service in the intelligence business.

I began my career in 1963, when I was commissioned from the ROTC program at the University of Maryland as a Second Lieutenant in the Air Force. I spent a couple tours in "my" war, in Southeast Asia. I certainly didn't plan on sticking around for 54 years. I would have never dreamed in my wildest imagination that I'd close my intelligence career in a job that gives me the privilege of briefing the President. And in 1963, there's simply no way you could have told me that I'd spend six-plus years briefing our nation's first African-American President. That's something my father and mother would have been astounded by and proud of.

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Looking back over my more-than a half-century in the intelligence profession, one of the most compelling questions I get asked is – why? As in, why do we do intelligence, and why would I do it for so long? Particularly over the past few years, which haven't exactly been a cake walk, as the American public has held very public and very critical discussions on how we do intelligence in this country, I've spent some time and thought on the question of why we do, or for that matter any nation-state does intelligence, and why I've stuck around.

I believe at its most basic level, we conduct intelligence to help reduce uncertainty for our national security decision makers, starting with "intelligence customer number one" – the President. We can't eliminate uncertainty for him or any decision maker, but we can provide insight and analysis to help their understanding and to make uncertainty at least manageable, so that our national-security decision makers can make educated decisions with an understanding of the risk involved, and so that we and our friends and allies operate on a shared understanding of the facts and the situation.

That's why we briefed each of the Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates this summer and fall, to help reduce uncertainty for our next President, so that he or she steps into the Oval Office with as good of an understanding of our complex and uncertain world as we can provide them.

The world has changed – a lot – since I was "hacking" an analog TV set in 1953. Today, because of the internet, it's a whole lot easier for 12-year-old kids to find entertainment. And of course, the internet has also profoundly changed both the challenges and opportunities we encounter when doing intelligence work. There is a global onrush of technology that's increasingly hard to adapt to. Technical areas like artificial intelligence, healthcare and agriculture, self-driving cars, 3D printing, genetic engineering, all have the potential to revolutionize our lives for the better, or they could present great vulnerabilities that are very hard to predict.

And the world is getting exponentially more complicated, as even mundane technologies are attaching themselves to the internet. My national counterintelligence executive recently told me about a problem our security folks came across. During a standard sweep of a new intelligence building before we moved in, they discovered several wireless signals transmitting out into the world.

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For a security type, this makes you very nervous. You wonder, is it some foreign power that's already planted a transmitter that's sending out messages?

So, the security folks located the sources, and were relieved to discover the signals were not from foreign intelligence bugs placed in the facility. They came from vending machines, trying to tell their distributer they were empty. Apparently, vending machines "phoning home" for refills [laughter] is a fairly common phenomenon, one we now know to look for and not get too excited about.

That's just the tip of the famous "internet of things" we keep talking and hearing about, which right now has more than 10.3 billion endpoints, projected to grow to almost 30 billion by 2020, entailing a market of $1.7 trillion. And we're headed for a reality in which even our clothes will be connected, and when doctors regularly prescribe wireless monitors for health conditions. Even now, I need a security waiver for my hearing aids, which have Bluetooth connectivity.

By the way, I don't turn on the Bluetooth. I've got enough information coming in without that – thanks!

I believe the intersection of the cyber threat with the internet of things will become a very, very complicated place. We saw that just a couple weeks ago, when someone made use of the internet of things to launch a massive denial of service attack here in the United States. As a global trend, this onrush of technology, if I can call it that, is driving both threats and opportunities for the IC. So we as a nation need to move past just defending ourselves from drink machines and hearing aids.

I think the second major, global trend that complicates our lives is that we're now living in a world of what I call unpredictable instability, in which right now two-thirds of the nations around the world are at some risk of instability in the next few years. Nearly everywhere, the Intelligence Community can point out the potential for failures or collapses of governments, but we can't anticipate the specifics – the when, where, and how – for our policymakers. That's why we characterize it as unpredictable.

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In the coming decades, an underlying meta-driver of unpredictable instability will be climate change; in fact, it already is. Major population centers will compete for ever-diminishing food and water, energy, and other commodities. And governments will have an increasingly difficult time controlling their territories. Because of all these factors, after ISIL is gone we can expect some other terrorist entity to rise in a cycle of extremism which will continue to confront us for the foreseeable future.

Unpredictable instability has been a constant for our current administration and will be for the next one too, no matter who our President is. And by the way, our more traditional adversaries and competitors like Russia and China, and Iran and North Korea will continue to challenge us.

So, I think it makes a lot of people nervous, that with an election cycle that's been sportier than we're used to, we'll elect a new President, with new national security leaders, and drop them into this situation. Election day, thank god, is now just four days away. [laughter] So hopefully we'll wake up in five days knowing who our next President will be.

And when I say "we," I don't just mean we in the United States. I mean the world. In my travels overseas this year, I've been taken aback by the intense interest in this campaign. People everywhere hang on every word of the candidates. And by the way, some try to do a lot more than just listen. Just a few weeks ago, the DHS Secretary and I released a joint statement, saying that the recent, high profile compromises of emails were directed at the highest levels of the Russian government. Our adversaries going after U.S. political organizations is a new, aggressive spin on the political cycle and something that makes our work much more difficult and demanding.

By the way, that Homeland Security Secretary is Morehouse Man Jeh Johnson. [applause] Jeh and I served together in the Pentagon when I was the undersecretary of defense for intelligence, and he was the general counsel for the Department of Defense, and we've continued that close association and friendship in our current capacities. It just so happens that Jeh and I were in the White House Situation Room last night for a meeting, and I let him know I was coming here. I think the world of Jeh, and I think we as a nation are blessed to have him in his very difficult and important position.

I know a lot of people have been feeling uncertainty about what will happen with this

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Presidential transition. There's been a lot of, if I can coin the word, "catastrophizing" in the 24-hour news cycle and on social media. So I'm here with a message that I've been repeating in public forums for the past few months – it'll be okay.

Our nation has a legacy of orderly transition of power, going back to George Washington retiring in 1797 when he turned the Presidency over to John Adams. I remember it well. [laughter] And because of our mission and our professionalism, in contrast any uncertainty surrounding the election and transition to the next administration, one constant in national security is the people of the Intelligence Community.

I consider today's Intelligence Community to be a pillar of stability during this transition. And if I had to answer why I've stuck around the IC for more than half-a-century, it's because of our challenging and important mission. We are facing the most diverse array of threats I've seen in my 53 years in this business. And it's our mission – the U.S. Intelligence Community's job – to reduce uncertainty for our national security decision makers. And I would also say I've stuck around because the magnificent women and men of the Intelligence Community around the world get up every morning and go to work on that mission.

So that's the windup. Here's the pitch. That work depends on clear and sober analysis, as free of bias as we can get, which means we need to look at the intelligence we collect from a variety of viewpoints that eliminate any biases that skew our analysis, that note and encourage dissents – disagreements among the intelligence agencies and analysts, and also that point out the things we don't know. And I can say from experience, it's hard to get a diversity of ideas from a room full of old, white, straight, cisgender men, who all look like me and who have similar life experiences.

That's why diversity in the Intelligence Community has been a priority of mine for decades, because, beyond being the right thing to do, improving diversity is critical to our mission, along with making sure minority employees have a seat at the table and that their voice is heard.

That's one reason why I was very happy in April 2014 when Frank Taylor took over as head of the intelligence element within the Department of Homeland Security. Frank also is an old friend from Air Force days, an African American, and he is absolutely superb as an intelligence senior leader. And of course, he works for the aforementioned Jeh Johnson. And I was elated in

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January 2015 when Lt. Gen. Vince Stewart was sworn in as the first black director of a major intelligence agency at the Defense Intelligence Agency – long, long overdue. I'm especially proud of Vince, because he's also the first Marine General to lead one of the agencies.

We certainly haven't reached nirvana with diversity and inclusion in the Intelligence Community. In fact, this summer, we publicly acknowledged that fact. In the past, we've classified Intelligence Community demographics reports, ostensibly because a foreign adversary could count up the numbers and somehow know more about our capabilities and extrapolate intelligence. But this spring, we put together an unclassified report and released it to the public.

It's not pretty, and we've drawn some scrutiny because of that. And we should draw scrutiny.

We have a mission that depends on diverse thoughts and ways of thinking, and yet we lag behind the corporate world and the rest of government when it comes to hiring and promoting both black and Hispanic women and men. Now that's on public record. That public report is going to put pressure on future leaders who succeed me to make things better, because we'll be held publicly accountable. That's another reason why I believe the IC has to protect our sources and methods and then be transparent about the things we can talk about.

We in the Intelligence Community dedicate our lives to analyzing the world and speaking hard truths to power. That means we'd better be able to face hard truths about ourselves, like the ones in this report. And that means we'd better be able to see our own biases, which is why I've made unconscious bias training mandatory for all senior intelligence officers in the Community.

I don't fully understand why our IC diversity lags so far behind the corporate world, although I suspect it has something to do with that phrase I opened with 20 minutes ago – black lives matter. If you feel as a community that you have to defend the fact that your lives matter, then I can understand not wanting to participate in the institutions you feel do not value your lives, particularly ones known for keeping secrets, which we are. Before this spring, we wouldn't even say how many minorities we employed.

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Well sometimes, it's good to be king. We ended that. And our transparency on this topic allows me to come to Morehouse today, to recognize our shortcomings publicly, and to say: Your experiences matter, and they'll make you a better and more effective intelligence officer. Your education here matters. Your knowledge and your ideas matter. Black lives matter, and we need you.

I sincerely hope there are people in this room who will join, or at least consider joining the U.S. Intelligence Community. If intelligence work isn't your cup of tea, please consider service elsewhere in government. We need smart and educated young people throughout our government, and service is so much better than quick money or a life of leisure. Many, many of you already know that, or I don't think you'd be here this morning.

Intelligence work, I consider a noble profession, with a mission that's critical to the safety and security of our nation and its citizens. And for those who are thinking about joining us, I'll tell you what my superb deputy, Stephanie O'Sullivan, what her first boss at the CIA told her about intelligence – "You'll never be bored. You'll experience every other human emotion, but you'll never, ever be bored."

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